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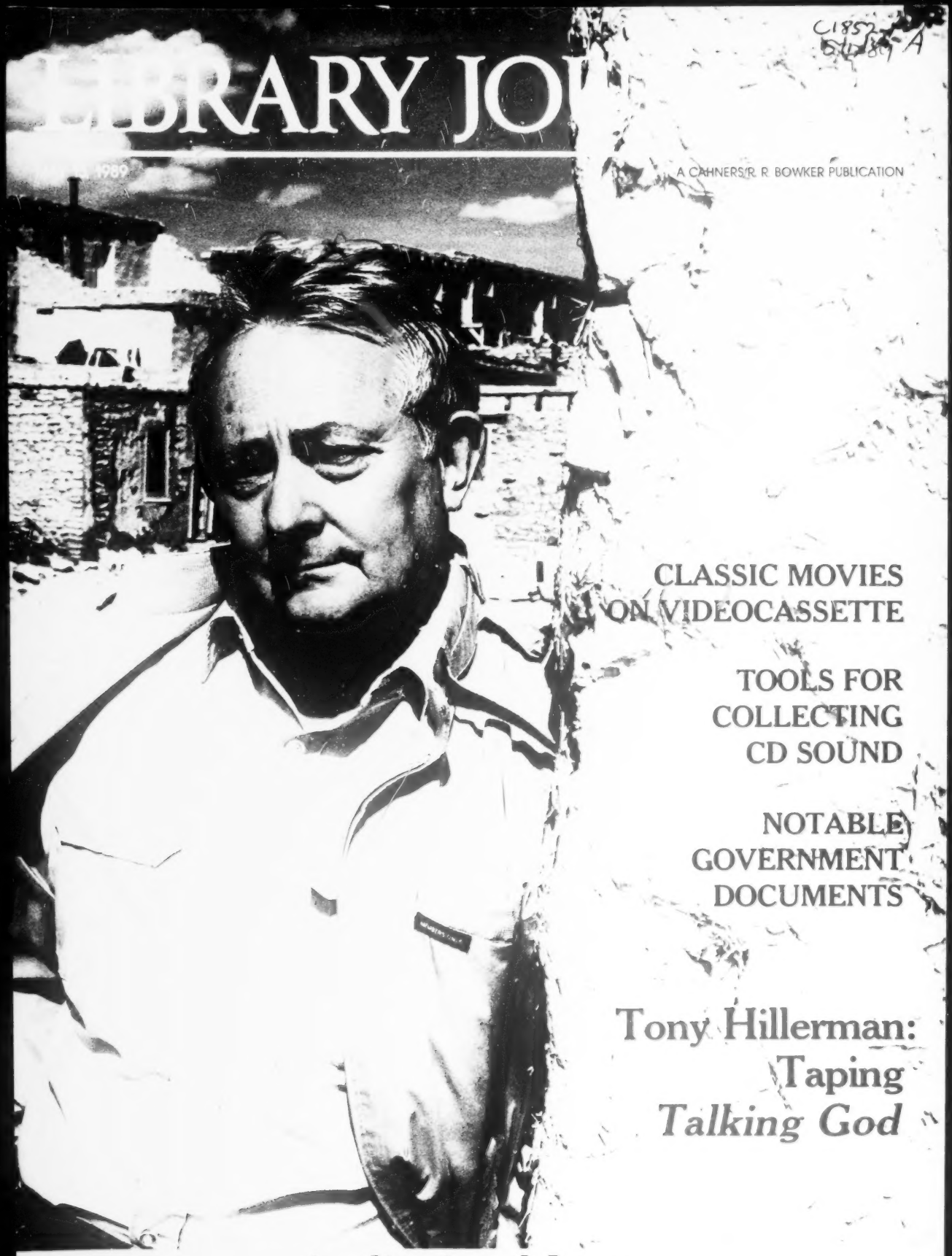

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Author-turned-author/narrator Tony Hillerman has achieved fame after years of writing. He discusses his new and old work in Contributing Factors, p. 108. Photograph by Barney Hillerman

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LIBRARY MARKET OUTLOOK

BY DEBORAH SELSKY

American Reading Habits (and Education) on the Rise

It is generally believed that the bombardment of video entertainment on American society has resulted in a decline in reading habits. At the end of 1988, The Gallup Organization conducted a survey to find out how, if at all, Americans' reading habits have changed. The survey asked a sample of adults which entertainment activities they had pursued the day before (see Chart A).

The greatest book readers, those who had read the most books on average in the last year, tended to be female, college educated, and heavy book buyers. Since reading and book buying tend to be closely associated with the level of education attained, and college enrollments and educational achievement have been growing steadily, the percentage of the population considered great book readers will continue to increase.

Educational attainment in the United States has grown consistently over the past few decades. From 1970 to 1987, the percentage of persons 25 years old or over who had completed four years of college or more rose from 11% to 19.9%. During this time, the percentage of women in this age group who had completed four years of college or more doubled from 8.2% to 16.5%.

Contrary to previous projections, the number of students enrolled in institutions of higher education increased 2.4% in the fall of 1988. The Department of Education's Center for Education Statistics had projected several years of stability in enrollment levels, based on the fact that the population of 18- to 24-year-olds, who are considered "college age," has been on the decline, due mainly to the "baby boomers" moving out of this age group. Since 1980, the number of people in this age group has decreased 11.6%.

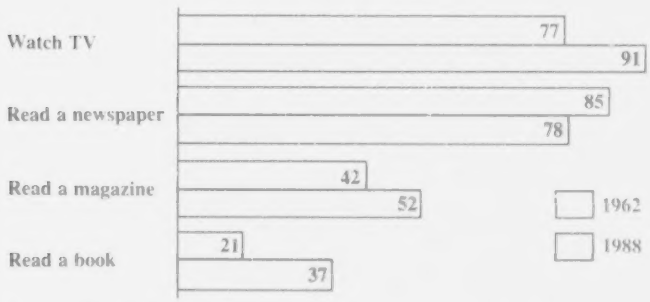
Despite this decline, however, an all-time high of 12.8 million students enrolled in colleges and universities last year. Enrollments in publicly funded colleges increased 3.5%, while those in privately funded schools fell 1.2%. The college participation rate for students in this age group increased between 1981 and 1986, resulting in stable enrollment rates overall.

Older students are enrolling in greater numbers. Between 1981 and 1986, the number of persons 25 years and older who were enrolled in schools of higher education increased 11% and grew to nearly 42% of the total enrollment population. In addition, the number of women enrolled in college grew 9.2% from 1981 to 1986 (see Chart B).

So, despite all the talk about "couch potatoes," the statistics show that book and magazine reading are significantly more popular than 26 years ago. Given that the amount of book reading seems to be tied to educational levels, and that those are on the rise, the future looks good for library usage.

CHART A

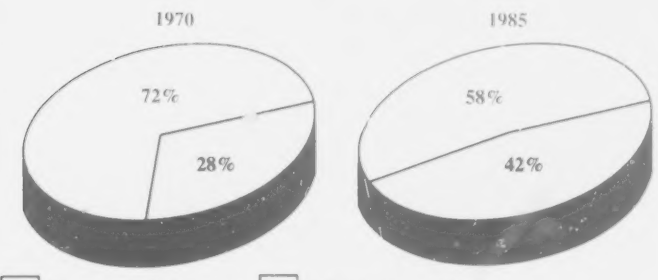
Percent of Adults Who Pursued This Activity Yesterday
1962 vs. 1988



Source: The Gallup Organization, Inc.

CHART B

College Enrollment by Age of Student
(% of total)



Deborah Selsky is an economist with Cahners Economics, which provides industry analyses and forecasting services for the markets its magazines serve.

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